



# **STATE OF NEBRASKA**

**John A. Gale**  
**Secretary of State**

## **A Message from Secretary of State John Gale**

In October of 2002, Congress passed and President George Bush signed the Help America Vote Act. This Act is the beginning point in a new era of election administration in the United States.

The Act is uniquely American: it contains federal mandates to the states, but it doesn't federalize the system; it provides funding to the states, but the funding is not entirely just federal money due to the match requirement; the Act requires reporting and accounting but generally relies on the State Election Officers to carry out the goals of the Act in cooperation with local authorities.

In February 2003, the U.S. Congress in its Omnibus Appropriations bill included some \$1.5 billion to begin funding the reforms mandated under HAVA. In order to access its share, each State needs to create a State Plan Commission, which is broad-based, inclusive, and provides a voice for the various groups of citizens who have expressed concerns that their communities have not been well served. Those from the visually impaired and physically handicapped communities particularly come to mind.

This is truly an historic task. For the past century, the battle that has been fought has been over the issue of WHO shall vote. When our nation was founded, only white male adult landowners could vote. We have come a long way. The struggles to outlaw slavery, enfranchise blacks as citizens, allow women to vote, and reduce the voting age to 18 to give our youth a voice in their democracy, were tremendous struggles, finally leading to the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Civil Rights Act of 1974.

They were battles over inclusiveness in our democracy.

Now the struggle has shifted to issues of the fairness of the election system and the machinery of elections...the process of registering voters, casting ballots, and counting votes. What each State Commission does will be historic, and is part of the dynamic of changing the face of elections in America.

For the first time in 100 years, we have an opportunity to review and make significant improvements in our election systems. It's time to invest some money where our ballot boxes are. These federal dollars will help strengthen our elections process by improving access at the polls, increasing our technology levels, and helping us educate and train voters and poll workers alike.

The responsibility placed by the Federal government onto state election officials must be taken very seriously. The U.S. Congress has allocated unprecedented levels of funding to improve the machinery of elections nationwide, in order to accomplish a new level of fairness, reliability and inclusiveness, nearly uniform across the country. I approach this task as a clear mission delegated to

my office, which we will not fail. We will use the funds wisely and meet the goals squarely. It will require a new form of relationship between state and local election officials, a new level of cooperation that will maintain the fair and uniform election process that Nebraska has developed, while effectively and efficiently developing processes to encourage every eligible citizen to participate in our system of democracy.

The first step in this journey was the appointment of the State Plan Commission. I convey my warmest thanks to those members who participated in the process. The long days and numerous hours spent discussing the intricacies of election administration were invaluable in the preparation of this Plan. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the efforts of Ms. Martha Gadberry, who as facilitator of the Commission meetings, was successful in getting the group to function not only as advocates for their particular constituency, but as a team working together to improve the election process.

The attached Plan was intended to be and should be treated as a living document. It will serve as a changing road map that will track not only the successes but also the failed initiatives along the way. To that end, I welcome everyone's input, not only during the 30 day comment period mandated by the Act, but at any time as this path is traveled. Please don't hesitate to contact my office with comments, suggestions or criticisms. Help us to make our democratic system be the best it can be to serve America.